

Climate, supply fears boost UK nuclear case says the Energy minister

A widely circulated article picked up by newspapers across the world. It started at Reuters but is clearly significant opinion.

Oberlin, Kansas
February 13, 2006

Growing concern about climate change and the security of international energy supplies are boosting the case for a new generation of nuclear power stations in the UK, the energy minister said on Monday.

Two of the advantages of nuclear energy are that it provides energy without producing carbon dioxide emissions and it also lessens dependence on external energy imports, Malcolm Wicks, the UK Minister of Energy, said.

"The challenge (of climate change) reopens the question of whether we should have a new generation of nuclear reactors," Wicks told an oil conference. "On the pro-nuclear side, it's a clean form of energy. And geopolitics would suggest that it might make sense for the UK to home-grow more energy."

Concern about increasing dependency on foreign oil and gas suppliers has risen since Russia cut off gas supplies to the Ukraine in a dispute over prices.

"The standoff between Russia and the Ukraine sent a shiver down the collective European energy spine," Wicks said. Geopolitics "looms ever larger" in the debate on the future of energy, he said.

The major obstacle to new nuclear power stations was the issue of how to dispose of nuclear waste. Wicks said that he believed the answers to how to deal with the waste existed, but the public remained to be convinced.

Wicks said that he had not decided in favor or against more nuclear energy as the government conducts a wide-ranging energy policy review.

"We enter the review 'nuclear neutral' but we need to have an answer by the summer for the prime minister," Wicks said.

Most of Britain's aging nuclear power stations are due to start closing from 2010 and only one will be left operating by the mid 2023 unless new plants are built. Nuclear provides about a fifth of the country's electricity.

Nuclear power faces fierce opposition from environmental groups on safety grounds.